

Statement of Mark Simms, Chief Executive of the P3 Charity Group to the Grenfell Inquiry

1. My name is Mark Simms and I am the Chief Executive of the P3 Charity Group. I have been in this role for five years, first as acting CEO in 2014 and on a permanent basis from 2016 onwards. I qualified as a Registered Mental Nurse in 1990 and have held a number of senior management roles in both the NHS and private sector. I have worked in the voluntary sector since 1997.
2. I make this statement on behalf of the Rugby Portobello Trust (“RPT”) and have structured it as set out below to address the request made by the Inquiry:
 - a. A brief history of the RPT so that the Inquiry understands its role in the community prior to the Grenfell fire.
 - b. The provision of emergency relief by the RPT, its staff and its volunteers in the immediate aftermath of the fire.
 - c. A specific response to each of the questions put to me by the Inquiry in their letter of 16 September 2019.

Who are P3?

3. P3 is a charity and social enterprise made up of passionate individuals who care about people. Our mission is to improve lives and communities by delivering services for socially excluded and vulnerable people to unlock their potential and open up new possibilities.
4. We run a variety of services all across the UK that aim to give everyone the chance to be part of the community they live in and feel connected to society. Our philosophy is that everyone is unique, and with support and confidence people can develop and achieve their aims and ambitions.
5. The RPT is part of the P3 Charity Group as set out below.



History of the Rugby Portobello Trust

6. The RPT is an amalgamation of the Rugby Clubs (founded in 1884), The Portobello Trust (formed in 1986) and Portobello Houseshare (formed in 1992) that merged in 2003 to provide integrated support for young people in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.
7. The RPT is based in Walmer Road in North Kensington at the heart of an area identified nationally as having the highest levels of income inequality, with higher than average levels of violence, crime and substance misuse. The RPT site is approximately 400 yards from the Grenfell Tower.
8. RPT works with local children and young people to help them to fulfil their potential, to keep them safe and build and engage with their community. This is achieved by providing a range of skills, activities and facilities alongside guidance and support.
9. In 2009 RPT merged with the UK-wide charity P3. P3 deliver services for socially excluded and vulnerable people offering support with housing, social care, health, justice and citizen services, including youth services. P3 has been supporting people for over 45 years and its larger centralised infrastructure enabled RPT to focus on the expansion of its play and youth services. The RPT has such a strong identity and lengthy history in the community it retained its name and functioned as it did previously post-merger.

10. In 2009 – 2016 I was actively involved in the management of the RPT and worked in the North Kensington community part time, supporting the integration of the RPT under the P3 umbrella while maintaining its core identity.

11. The RPT is housed in a modern building that contains:

- A school for those who are unable to use mainstream education.
- Learning space to operate programmes like the parent's support project to upskill people with key skills.
- A youth and sports club.
- A music studio.
- Office space.

12. At street level, there are four offices, the school with four classrooms, a dining/craft area, x4 smaller learning spaces, the kitchen and toilets. In the basement, there is the sports hall, a kitchen, a community room/bar, the music studio, gymnasium, changing room/toilets and a sexual health clinic. A series of photographs are appended at MS/1 (URN/.....) that show the RPT's facilities.

13. Ordinarily, the premises are open from 8am to 10pm. The school operates from 9am – 3pm and afterwards there is an after school club followed by junior and senior youth clubs.

14. The RPT is operated by 25 members of staff who mostly work on a full time basis managing and delivering the operational day to day activity with back office support provided from P3's staff in Ilkeston. The RPT staff consists of a senior manager, three service managers, youth/community/parent workers, music technicians and a chef/cook. The staff see themselves as the caretakers of the building and the services it provides as the centre truly belongs to the community it serves.

Volunteers and Supporters

15. The volunteers and supporters were critical in helping and supporting victims in the aftermath of the Grenfell Fire. Therefore I have outlined their general function and will set out later in this statement how they assisted us in providing support, kindness and practical assistance to those in need. All of the support provided by the RPT was by its own staff and volunteers that we were able to mobilise quickly given our database, communication channels and that many lived locally.
16. Supporters and volunteers play a vital role in improving and extending RPT's capacity to implement all the vital services it provides. Private funding has always played an important part in the history of the organisation, giving the RPT the flexibility to adapt to the circumstances of the young people they serve. Without our teams of volunteers, much of the work the RPT does would grind to a halt. All help to foster the ethos of a community that supports and enables children and families to fulfil their potential.
17. The RPT has around 200 volunteers who are all DBS checked and trained in safeguarding and the RPT Code of Conduct. Further volunteer training then takes place that is relevant to the area they have elected to support. References are also required for all new volunteers. Once this process has taken place, volunteers are matched with a role that fits their skills, experience and availability.
18. Some volunteers apply specific expertise to their role (e.g. tutoring A level chemistry) while others apply generalist skills (e.g. helping with reading). Most volunteers have weekly placements working with our clients. These placements are typically for an hour and a half and must be for a minimum of two academic terms. Other volunteers support the Trust by working in fundraising activities and occasionally volunteers help with one-off projects or at a single event.

Wednesday 14 June 2017

19. On 14 June 2017, Chris Collins, the caretaker of the RPT was woken from his sleep by a member of the community shouting and banging on his door. They asked Chris to open the Rugby Portobello Trust building as there was a fire in Grenfell Tower and people were being evacuated and had nowhere to go. Chris and his partner, an RPT

volunteer called Janice Watts, went immediately to Rugby Portobello Trust and opened up.

20. They set out seating in the main hall and Janice started to make drinks for the people who were arriving. The people coming into the premises were shocked, bewildered and often in various states of undress given they had been sleeping. At 5.00 am Chris called Riley Taggart, the Director of Services as it had become apparent that the situation was very serious and that the number of people coming to the building was overwhelming. Chris told Riley that he would need some support to cope with the numbers of people and what he could do to support them. Riley advised Chris that he was on his way in to provide support, help and assess the situation.
21. On arrival, Riley assessed matters and decided to contact me as the Group Chief Executive for advice and support. This was around 6am. At the time I was at home in Nottinghamshire, preparing to leave for an early morning meeting in Cheltenham.
22. When Riley called me, he explained the situation was much more serious than he thought. This was mainly centred on the fact that there appeared to be no one around helping the people who had fled the fire. There were no answers from anyone as to what the people who had been evacuated should do and what might happen to them, where they might stay etc.
23. I immediately caught the first train to London. I felt that we were dealing with an unprecedented serious situation and the staff, volunteers and community might need my support and experience. I also realised that I had executive authority on behalf of the charity and would be able to realise our resources and assets more appropriately if I were present on site. I had worked in the area previously in my role as Director of Rugby Portobello Trust and knew the community well.
24. By 6.30am local members of the community had started to arrive at the RPT of their own accord to help people being evacuated.
25. I arrived at the RPT somewhere between 7.30 and 8.00 am. When I arrived, people were sitting in the sports hall and all along the stairs with blankets wrapped around

them. I would say that we had over 100 people in the building of all ages in various states of confusion and distress at this time. After assessing the immediate needs of those present, I realised that people would need some medical assistance as they would be without essential medication (we had at least one person who was diabetic) and were suffering from shock. We had in our care one elderly frail lady who needed physical assistance with her needs.

26. By now our entire staff team had arrived at work as well as many of our local volunteers who were doing their best to provide care and comfort to people. Our aim was to treat survivors with kindness and humanity by providing them with a safe space to get the immediate support they needed. At this stage it was becoming apparent from what people were saying and the media reports that people had perished in the fire and this was a catastrophe that was absolutely unimaginable before this day.

27. From our contingency planning for services that we deliver across the country I was aware that there is a protocol whereby local authorities establish a command centre. In RBKC this is called the Borough Emergency Command ("BEC"). Following this protocol, I contacted the BEC by phone and email. I got no answer on the telephone never received a response to my email¹. Then, I went on to the street to see if I could get the help of the emergency services, but they were clearly dealing with an enormous catastrophe and there was no-one available. I saw hundreds of people out on the street, the tower was still smoking and the fire fighters were still on scene. There were engines, ambulances and police all over the street. I realised at this time that we would have to develop our own response and manage until help arrived.

28. Looking around the people who had attended the RPT, I decided that we needed to organise and structure our own response. It had been put out on Twitter and London Radio that the RPT was open to survivors and our volunteers had arrived in greater numbers as they had woken up and seen what was going on we estimate that there were around 40 volunteers on site. We were now approaching 150 people on site from Grenfell Tower.

¹ I am unable to produce any emails I sent or received due to an email server migration that means these documents are no longer accessible.

29. I determined that people were going to need access to cash to purchase emergency items. Therefore an email request for financial assistance was put out to our supporters for physical cash that we could distribute as people had arrived with no possessions, including identification, bank cards etc.
30. Many of the people presenting at the RPT needed medical support as they did not have their usual medication with them and some were showing signs of shock and breathing difficulties. There was also an immediate need for some non-urgent medical advice and assistance. Therefore we organised for a local doctor to set up a temporary surgery in our youth room and a local pharmacist brought supplies and set up a pop up pharmacy in the room next door. This allowed people to seek medical advice, treatment and obtain the medication they needed. I do not recall the name of the doctor or pharmacist who attended the RPT.
31. At around 10am there were hundreds of people on the street outside, together with a significant media presence. We were in danger of being overwhelmed as people were searching desperately for their friends and family. At the same time we were supporting a significant number of survivors on the premises. Riley, with the support of volunteers manned the doors and we decided that the RPT would only be able to support people evacuated from Grenfell Tower. We wanted to make this a safe space for survivors and I decided moving forwards we would not allow non RPT volunteers or anyone who was not known to us into the building.
32. The RPT team of staff and volunteers were instructed to let people remain in control and make their own choices. This was important as they had lost everything. I would describe the RPT space as a safe and a quiet environment. We told survivors that we would not speak of what they told us and that they were in charge. People were reassured that we would get them what they needed and I think survivors understood that we were doing our best in very difficult circumstances. Survivors were helping survivors and the community was doing its best to care for its own.
33. Around 11.00am, the Council Housing Team arrived along with someone who introduced himself to me as Nial, a Bronze Commander from the Red Cross. We set

the Council Housing Team up in one of our meeting rooms, gave them access to our Wi-Fi codes and IT equipment if they needed it. They started to meet people in the RPT to discuss their personal circumstances as by now it was clear that no one would be returning to Grenfell Tower that night. We also allocated the Red Cross Bronze Command a room in the RPT who use this to collate information rather than transmitting information out.

34. In terms of wider offers of support, as we were not a designated emergency response organisation, through media channels, Twitter, Facebook and the media outside we redirected offers of aid and donations to the Kensington and Chelsea Foundation who was better equipped to co-ordinate and manage this.
35. The distribution of cash was done by our volunteers who would speak to people to understand what their emergency needs were, give them the money they needed, what flat they were from and then a record was made setting out how much/who they had given it to and what flat they lived in. People's requests for financial assistance were taken at face value as there were no records to cross check, however this was a close community and people in the Grenfell Tower knew each other; therefore there was a self-regulating element to this exercise. The cash distribution became a mini on site bank that continued in the subsequent days until it was not needed anymore.
36. Volunteers were instructed to give the money to survivors without fear or favour, although some survivors were very reluctant to take any money at all. People were still in a traumatised state and fearful that this would impact on their rights or benefits. From our perspective the hope was that this small gesture would help empower survivors to take back a small element of control over their lives. They were encouraged to buy their own shoes and personal items to try and help restore an element of dignity. The money could be used for whatever survivors wanted and no receipts were required to be submitted to the RPT.
37. This initial exercise was helpful in us starting to record who had been affected, what flat they had come from and what their needs were. We started to collect the names of people in the building and asking people if they had seen their neighbour when

they had escaped the fire. Later on that day this was turned into a list that was put on the wall in the main hall.

38. We did this because there were so many people arriving at our door asking if we had seen family, friends or loved ones. Following this exercise, we were able to confirm the people that were inside our building; however we were not in a position to determine the whereabouts of other people.
39. Throughout the course of the day we worked with survivors and the council to ensure that everyone who needed a bed for the night was able to get one at a hotel or with family or friends. I instructed staff to block book as many hotel rooms as they could. The Red Cross told us on several occasions that we may be set up as a rest centre which would mean that people were sleeping in our building. As a consequence, I made efforts to obtain mattresses and bedding, however this did not materialise as we managed to find accommodation for everyone in conjunction with the Council Housing Team.
40. During the course of the day, a volunteer obtained mobile phones that were donated to us by Carphone Warehouse, Three Mobile and Vodafone. These phones contained a pre-paid sim and we distributed these to survivors and started to log contact details for people. Survivors were understandably desperate to contact family and friends to tell them they were alive and seek their support. We also started to set up and structure the clothing donations we had received so that people could shop within the RPT for whatever they needed.
41. Much of the work throughout the rest of the day was simply providing compassion, care, support and kindness to people who had lost everything and did not know the fate of their family, neighbours and friends. Throughout the day I was collating and briefing survivors, staff and volunteers on the information that we were getting across the borough such as where the injured had been taken, the distribution of financial aid, the status of the official response and anything else that we had heard from members of the community and other organisation such as the Al Manaar Mosque and the Clement James Centre. I did this by standing up and making periodic announcements in the RPT to those that were there.

42. Several local councillors offered help but there was an absolute sense that everyone was overwhelmed and by now the hostility towards the local council was rising. People were very angry that the fire in the tower had been predicted and that also there was an absence of a coordinated visible response from the council. We thought it best to remain separate to the authority; although I did keep in frequent contact with Councillor Catherine Faulks who made sure that we were able to communicate directly with the leadership at the council to make them aware of the issues that we were facing. For example, I asked for to make contact with the BEC and make sure that they knew that survivors were at our building and any help was directed to us. She did this but by then the BEC was no longer in use and she herself was struggling to get us any answers as there was so much going on. It was Catherine who made sure that the housing team came to RPT.

43. I spoke periodically to the Council Housing Team who had worked really hard throughout the day to meet with everyone and find people places to stay and we agreed on a strategy to get people to hotels. The problem was West London was virtually inaccessible so we contacted Clarendon Cars and local volunteers with transport and they all came to help transport people to their accommodation. We managed to get everyone transport arranged and a hotel room to sleep in for the night.

44. At around 9.00 pm more survivors arrived at RPT by bus from the Harrow Club. I was told that the survivors were sent to us as the Harrow Cub was closing and we might be a rest centre. The people that we greeted from the bus were absolutely confused and bewildered as to what might be happening for them. The council staff and our volunteers again worked with these individuals with great care, compassion and kindness to make sure that they had somewhere to go that night, with clothes and resources to take with them.

45. By early evening at around 7pm, there was a huge crowd gathering on the street outside the RPT and the mood was very tense as people were desperate and angry about what had happened. The weather was very warm and humid. A couple of my staff had been assaulted when they had stopped people from entering our building.

46. I saw a lady collapsed in the street after hearing that one of her relatives might had died in the fire. The media turned their cameras on this woman and began photographing her; members of the crowd were very unhappy with this behaviour and turned against the media. There were scuffles in the street.
47. I was very concerned about this incident and the potential for things to escalate significantly, therefore I spoke to the East London Mosque who helped us organise a street Iftar when the sun set as it was the middle of Ramadan. We all participated in the organisation and partaking of Iftar at around 9:30pm. Staff and volunteers closed the street, set out tables and people broke fast together and said prayers. Everyone who was there, regardless of their faith joined in with this. It was a very calming experience and managed to de-escalate the rising anger in the immediate vicinity.
48. By midnight everyone who had arrived at the RPT throughout the day had somewhere safe to stay that night, clothes and resources that they needed for overnight stays and cash that we gave them. We had no idea what the next day would hold. There was still no plan, there was still no communication from any statutory body on what to do, therefore we told everyone who came to RPT on the first day that we would be there for them on the second day and we would try and find out what the longer term plan was and help them with whatever they needed.

Thursday 15 June 2017

49. After the survivors had gone, we tidied up the RPT and prepared for day two. Our doors opened at 6am with staff and our regular volunteers undertaking a variety of activity in the building supporting the different services on offer. People who had been evacuated from Grenfell Tower started arriving around 7.00 am from hotels.
50. We were much more organised now with rotas for staff and volunteers. This included things like covering reception and the phones, personally greeting people at the door, understanding their needs and showing them through the building. Survivors were helped to get clothes and personal items, cash, food etc. by the same person who greeted them at the front door so they did not have to just wander in and tell their story over and over again.

51. At this stage Selfridges had offered us their staff who helped support us in structuring and managing our clothing supplies so that people were not rummaging for items. This worked well and ensured that items were grouped properly and in the right sizes. The people needing help were shapes and sizes therefore volunteers went out and purchased any items that we did not have.
52. We tried to get people as much of a personalised service as possible with survivors in control. People were in shock, people were finding out that relatives and friends had died or were in hospital so we were doing our best to support people practically and emotionally by listening to them, providing comfort and offering practical support. Clarendon Cars, a local taxi firm had agreed that any survivors could use their vehicles for free but needed to be booked through the RPT so we had a small team organising transport to get people to and from hotels, hospitals etc.
53. At this stage, we had suspended all of our services until further notice and closed the school that was on site. We had told everyone who had survived the fire that this building was theirs for as long as they needed it and we would support them for as long as they wanted us.
54. From this point, each day pretty much carried on as the day before, with survivors turning up early in the morning and leaving in the evening. The RPT staff and volunteers put their lives on hold to support the RPT in its delivery of care and essential services during this critical period.

16 June 2017

55. On the 16 June we were asked by the Evening Standard and Kensington and Chelsea Foundation to distribute funds to survivors that had been raised by the British public. We made it clear that we were willing to distribute grants to survivors on the basis the donating organisation could not tell us what the grant was for and there were no conditions attached to the grant.

56. People were concerned that in taking money, they would be signing their legal rights away and/or that their benefits would be stopped. Both survivors and the RPT were contacted by solicitors wanting to provide survivors with legal advice. This was a concern to us given the vulnerable state people were in; therefore we directed all legal questions and queries to the North Kensington Law Centre. We advised survivors to take their time and seek support if they were offered services that were unclear.
57. From 16 June 2017 onwards, we provided payments in partnership with the National Zakat Foundation. We passed cash to survivors where they had not got bank accounts. We arranged for banks to visit the RPT so they could meet with survivors to organise new accounts and bank cards.

17 June 2017 Onwards

58. The RPT carried on supporting survivors in the way that I have described in this statement until mid-July when key workers were assigned to families and residents. We made the decision that the RPT service would remain for as long as survivors needed it.
59. The RPT was invited to a meeting at Westway Trust on Monday 19 July 2017 hosted by Hilary Patel from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. We expected at this meeting Ms Patel was going to provide us with information and share the medium and longer term plan with us. We told survivors that this meeting was taking place and we would have more information for them after the meeting.
60. On arrival at the meeting we all went around the room and introduced ourselves and the organisations we were from. At the end of this, the meeting was closed. Nothing useful or productive in terms of information was shared at that meeting and people were very angry that there was no further information or commitment to resolve any of the issues that we were facing. There was a commitment to a further meeting which never happened.
61. Around 17 June 2017, we sourced donated laptops and IT equipment and established a drop in room for those that needed to get back online. We worked with a group of

technology entrepreneurs in order to scale up the initiative that led to the “Tech Shop” being established as a pop up shop on Clarendon Road. Only the residents, the authorising partners and the volunteers knew its location. We also operated under a no press and no social media policy to protect residents and to operate as freely as possible.

62. This was staffed by our volunteers with support from companies like Apple, Samsung and Google who provided technical staff to assist survivors in getting back online and recovering any data, photographs and or videos that they had in cloud storage. In addition, through a voucher scheme, survivors who attended were provided with a laptop and a more sophisticated smart phone to assist them in their efforts to rebuild their lives. This service ran from 19 – 30 June 2017. For further details see the Grenfell Final Donor Report exhibited at MS/2 (URN.....).
63. Additionally we secured a package of support from Dixons/Carphone Warehouse that meant every resident would receive a number of electrical items to help them settle into their new home. This was referred to as the “New Dawn Package” and included a washing machine, fridge freezer, Hoover, iron, microwave, kettle, toaster, TV and a TV stand. This was available from 26 June 2017. I produce a copy of the presentation slides setting this out in more detail called Grenfell Tower New Dawn Support at MS/3 (URN.....).

Grant Payments

64. The sums that needed to be distributed through grant payments were considerable. P3 and the RPT were not set up to distribute significant sums of financial aid. In June 2017, I was asked by the Charity Commission if the RPT would be one of the main distributors for grant aid. At the time, as the figures were looking like the distribution total was over £10 million, I said no as I did not think that we were best placed to do this.
65. In August 2017 I was invited to a meeting with the Charity Commission where I was asked again whether the RPT would take a lead role in the grant distribution. I was aware that there had been some frustration expressed by Grenfell United that money

was not being paid out to those in need quickly enough, therefore I agreed that the RPT would design and administer the grants programme. I also felt that the people who needed the money were more likely to take it from the RPT as they trusted us.

66. The grants program was pretty straight forward for a number of reasons. Initially, we simply asked people if they needed any money and if they did we gave it to them. This was usually a few hundred pounds to last them a couple of days. We knew the survivors were staying hotels and would need food, clothes and transport. We did this on the basis of trust. We kept simple records of how much we had given to someone and what date.
67. As the program became more established we set up small grants teams made up of staff and volunteers. We were working in conjunction with the National Zakat Foundation, using a shared Google file. I appointed a lead volunteer and a lead member of staff to coordinate donations. After the first few days we started to take bank account details and organised the transfer of larger sums of money directly into the bank accounts of the former residents of the Grenfell Tower.
68. The grants program worked as we had the contact details and bank account details of the residents. We simply texted or emailed them with the offer of grants, they messaged back accepting the grant and confirming the account that the money was to be paid into. We then made the payment. We already had confirmed account details and asked each time for 4 digits of the account number to ensure that we were talking to the account holder.
69. In addition to the funds raised by the British public that have been distributed to former Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk residents, the RPT distributed a further £1,755,000 to Lancaster West Estate residents on behalf of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea as these residents were left without basic utilities for weeks after the fire.
70. The Kensington and Chelsea Foundation ("the Foundation") provided a 'Fresh Start' grant of £10,000 to each former household from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk to

help people rebuild their lives. This money came from the Foundation's Grenfell Tower Fund.

71. The Evening Standard Dispossessed Fund paid £25,000 per household via four separate payments of £1,000, £1,000, £10,000 and £13,000
72. Artists for Grenfell, who raised money for Grenfell survivors through the charity single 'Bridge over Trouble Water', asked RPT to distribute a grant of £2000 per household which we did.
73. Further grants were available through other organisations, for example the grants distributed by the London Emergencies Trust to support families who lost someone in the fire or residents who were hospitalised after the fire.
74. The RPT issued over 3,200 individual grants totalling more than £16.8 million. These funds, donated by the public, were collected by multiple organisations and passed onto RPT for distribution to Grenfell residents. There were three different grant streams and the RPT administered all of the grants with support from the Grenfell Muslim Response Unit (GMRU). 100% of the money that was donated to the RPT was passed directly to those affected by the fire and the RPT's running costs were taken out of money we raised separately.

Why did the RPT become involved? Was this part of the official response?

75. The RPT became involved because the community needed it. As described, it is in the heart of the community where the fire occurred and has been involved in supporting families for 130 years.
76. There was a need for survivors to be provided with a safe place where they could gather themselves, begin to process what had happened to them and obtain support for basic human needs (clothing, shelter and food).
77. The response of the RPT was not part of any official response and the RPT had not been involved in any disaster management plan prior to the fire.

What provisions and services were made available by your organisation and how was this organised?

78. The services that were made available and how they were operated have been set out in detail within the body of the statement, however in summary the services included:

- a. A safe space for survivors to rest, talk and take time to process what had happened.
- b. Food, clothing and arranging accommodation.
- c. Arranging access to medical care to deal with health/medication requirements.
- d. Financial aid to purchase essentials.
- e. Facilitating access to the Council Housing Team.
- f. Distribution of mobile phones and technical support.
- g. Transport to and from accommodation.
- h. Grant aid.

What support was made available to your organisation to assist your response by local government, central government and/or the TMO?

79. No support was made available by any of these organisations.

Who came to use your organisation (survivors, bereaved, residents, evacuated residents from walkways, wider community, etc)?

80. Survivors and the bereaved of those who lived in the Grenfell Tower accessed the support of the RPT and all the services we made available. For the reasons I have set out in this statement, this is where the greatest need was and where our focus needed to be.

The numbers of people who visited your organisation and used the services available.

81. We estimate the number of survivors and bereaved that used our building and received support from us was around 210. This equated to 165² households from Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk.

Was there any official presence at your organisation or co-ordination role by local government, central government and/or the TMO?

82. The Council Housing Team was present at the RPT and worked tirelessly with the RPT staff and volunteers to find people. There was no other official presence or co-ordination role at the RPT by the organisations set out above.

The immediate needs of the bereaved, survivors and residents that were apparent on 14 June 2017 and in the first week

83. The bereaved, survivors and residents had multiple needs. They were understandably traumatised by what had happened to them. We found them in an incredibly vulnerable state having lost relatives, friends, their home and possessions. Initially they had no access to money, clothes, identification, food and accommodation.

84. Once the RPT was opened up, we dealt with the immediate need of clothing, food, money and accommodation very quickly thanks to the RPT staff, our volunteers and supporters. We were then able to address secondary needs such as obtaining identification, bank accounts, getting online and obtaining new technology.

85. Our approach was to provide a safe space, to talk to people and to listen to what their needs were. We would then try and devise a solution to meet that need.

Your organisation's biggest challenges in providing emergency relief to those in need.

86. The RPT is not an emergency response organisation. Nothing like this was ever envisaged and the scale of the Grenfell fire and the numbers of people that were affected was unprecedented. We had no plan to deal with a disaster like this, however our skill is in our ability to understand and work with people. Therefore we were able

² A household was defined as a single family group, as more than one family group lived at some of the flats.

to mobilise a large volunteer workforce very quickly who put their lives on hold for considerable periods of time and we could distribute financial aid rapidly from the RPT's own funds and money from supporters in the locality. This had a very real and immediate impact.

87. In my view, the lack of communication from other lead agencies at a strategic level outlining what the plan was and how things were being managed was the biggest challenge. At the RPT, I kept thinking that help and support would come from other lead organisations, however it never materialised.

Observations on the Official Response

Whether your organisation had any pre-existing plans or agreements with the RBKC in the event of an emergency such as the Grenfell Tower Fire

88. No. There were no plans or agreements of this nature with the RBKC.

The government's coordination and utilisation of the voluntary sector to the Grenfell Tower fire

89. I am unable to respond to this generally, however in relation to the RPT and our experience, there was no co-ordination of our services by the government. There was a complete absence of communication and co-ordination.

90. The community needed the RPT to respond and the services that we offered were in response to the needs that survivors presented with.

Any interaction your organisation had with Central Government, Local Government, the London Gold Response Team and the TMO

91. There was no interaction with central government at a strategic level. Nick Hurd who at the time was the Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service attended the RPT in the immediate aftermath offering his help and support. Nick was known to me through his previous role as Minister for Civil Society and he offered his help and support on specific issues that were affecting individuals that we were struggling to

resolve. As the Grenfell emergency continued Nick went on to become Minister for Grenfell.

92. I have outlined that the only interaction we had with local government in the immediate aftermath was the Council Housing Team.

93. There was no interaction with the TMO.

Any interaction your organisation had with the British Red Cross and/or any observations you had about their involvement in the response

94. As stated, on 14 June 2017, a man from the Red Cross introduced himself to me as Nial. He indicated that he was the Bronze Commander. Nial told me that we would meet every hour and he would provide me with a briefing. This did not happen. I saw him approximately 6 times in the immediate days after the fire, however he did not seem to know what was going on. I provided him with any updates and information that I had.

95. I recollect that at one stage, he told me that the RPT was going to be designated as a rest centre. Therefore I contacted our maintenance team to assess how many beds, mattresses and duvets we could bring from our stores and how quickly they could be brought here. In the end, this equipment was not required as we managed to find accommodation for everyone and the Westway Centre was designed as the rest centre.

Any interaction your organisation had with the Westway Centre and/or any observations you have about their involvement in the response

96. The RPT had limited interaction with the Westway Centre ("the Centre"). On or around Monday 19 June 2017 we were asked if any staff could be sent to support survivors at the Centre. Survivors who were using RPT did not like attending the Westway Centre. They told me they were repeatedly asked the same questions by numerous different agencies.

97. I attended the Westway Centre on 28th June 2017 to meet survivors and Prince Charles who was visiting the centre. I was introduced to Prince Charles and he was very engaged with a number of invited survivors. I met with a couple of people who had escaped the fire and came to RPT. They had not been invited to meet Prince Charles, so I encouraged them to stand with me and meet him. He was very concerned for their welfare and was kind and considerate.

The management of physical donations and monetary donations and their distribution

98. Physical donations were structured depending on what they were by the RPT's volunteers so that survivors could easily identify and select what they needed. When we became overwhelmed with donations, we redirected these to other centres.

99. We responded and obtained the physical items that survivors needed by obtaining donations or purchasing them. Some survivors liked the support of a designated personal contact to go around the RPT and select what they wanted while others preferred to wander around alone. There were no rules in this sense and people chose the best approach for them.

100. Around £80,000 in physical cash was secured from supporters and P3 that was distributed in the immediate aftermath in the manner I have described in the statement.

101. We also distributed grant aid. Full details of the grants programme that the RPT administered is set out earlier in this statement.

102. The first grant we were asked to distribute was from the London Evening Standard in partnership with the National Zakat Foundation. The sum of £1,000 was provided to each family. Some of the payments were made to people in cash as they had an immediate need for funds and no access to bank accounts.

103. When grant payments came to us, we would either speak to survivors at the RPT or send them a text message on the mobile phone we had provided them with to send them details of what was being offered. As I have indicated, there were no

conditions in relation to these payments and families could spend the money on whatever was appropriate for them.

Coordination and utilisation of offers of assistance from the community

104. The RPT used its pre vetted volunteers and staff to provide assistance to survivors.

Management and utilisation of spontaneous volunteers

105. Spontaneous volunteers were not used by the RPT.

Your observations of the provision of services and support by Central Government, Local Government and/or the TMO.

106. There appeared to be an absence of co-ordination and communication. There needed to be a designated agency to co-ordinate who was doing what and provide regular updates for those delivering care and support at the front end.

Whether the response of Central Government, Local Government and/or the TMO took into account the needs of specific groups (eg children, young people, elderly, faith groups ethnic minorities and those with disability/communication needs)

107. With the exception of the Council Housing Team, there was no evidence from what I observed that the agencies above took into account the needs of specific groups.

Your observations of how Central Government, Local Government and/or the TMO engaged with the community to assist the response

108. None of the agencies engaged with the community quickly enough to make any discernible difference to them or their situation. By the time any serious attempt was made, the community no longer trusted the organisations to support them. It came too little, too late.

The overarching co-ordination and leadership role that Central Government, RBKC and the TMO had in the immediate aftermath

109. From what we experienced at the RPT, there was no overarching leadership and co-ordination in the immediate aftermath of the fire. The local community helped themselves with support from others.

Statement of Truth

I confirm that the contents of this witness statement consisting of 23 pages are true to the best of my knowledge and belief. I understand that this witness statement will form part of the evidence before the Grenfell Inquiry and will be published on the Inquiry's website.

Signed.....

Dated.....19th November 2019

